

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

Saturday, December 30, 2023
Pasadena, California, USA

Michigan Wolverines

Kris Jenkins

Press Conference



Q. Just talk about the week so far, and getting in, how has it been so far, and how ready are you for the game?

KRIS JENKINS: It's been great so far. You know, a lot of preparation has been going into this game and now that we are out in Cali, got an opportunity to enjoy Cali while still focusing on our preparation and fine tuning the details. I'm ready to play this game and I'm excited to play this game. I haven't gotten a lot of sleep waiting for this game. Really excited.

Q. Time change not affecting you too much?

KRIS JENKINS: It didn't affect us too much. I'm kind of surprised. I thought it was going to affect us more. I think on the way back, that's when it's going to hit us.

Q. Talk about Alabama has been on such a good run over the last ten, fifteen years, to face them in this game, how about that challenge?

KRIS JENKINS: Nothing but excited for this challenge. Everybody has counted us out of this shot. We have the opportunity to go against a top program and prove ourselves. So you know, nothing but exciting because these are the moments you play for. It's really exciting.

Q. What would it mean to you personally?

KRIS JENKINS: It would mean everything we work for the entire past three years, everything we have been trying -- pretty much my whole career, our whole lives, Rose Bowl championship, opportunity to play in the National Championship. That's the first thing and the only thing.

Q. Have you allowed yourself to think about the next game?

KRIS JENKINS: No, it's only this game. It's only this game

right now. You can't even look ahead until you take care of business now.

Q. What is different --

KRIS JENKINS: Because, you know, we are focusing on what's ahead of us, and you know, not the ultimate goal just yet. The ultimate goal is what's ahead of us right now. So we're focusing on now and we are focusing on ourselves and fine tuning the details.

Q. What went wrong the last two years --

KRIS JENKINS: Mainly our effort. Regardless of whatever game it is, we are going to make mistakes, but what we can control is our effort, and if you turn on the film, we were not satisfied with our effort playing in that game. When we turn on this film, we need to turn on the effort.

Q. How proud are you of this defensive line? Seems like there's All-Americans turned out every year.

KRIS JENKINS: Everybody's work ethic and pretty much everybody is talented but their willingness to work -- I'm proud of everybody. Everybody's willingness to come in here and have fun and still kick butt. It's amazing to be part of this.

Q. You're young and this Bowl is over a century old. Are you getting a sense of the mystique of the Rose Bowl yet?

KRIS JENKINS: Absolutely. You can feel it with the vibe and the atmosphere that's coming out here just how incredible and how important this Rose Bowl game is. Everybody has been saying it's the Granddaddy of them all. Like even being like right next to the stadium, I feel chills. I'm just excited.

Q. Talk about the defense and what's key?

KRIS JENKINS: Mainly our effort. That was one of the things we've been really focusing on for our four pillars. When he turn on the film last year, we were not satisfied with the amount of effort we put in on the defensive side of



... when all is said, we're done.®

the ball. We wanted to make sure we train in a way where we turn on the tape this year, it's a completely different defense you see on the field.

Q. Is that something that kind of flashes when you go back to this moment? How different do you feel like this defense is?

KRIS JENKINS: Absolutely. I feel a lot different in the sense that we just preach and we just hone in on shock and effort, just replacing bad habits. You're not going to be scared of making a mistake when you know 11 guys that are going to clean up for you regardless of what happens. It's football and mistakes are going to happen but we know with our shock and effort and the way we train and play --

Q. You have one of the best defensive rotations in all of football. What's it like going to battle with those guys each and every day?

KRIS JENKINS: It's awesome because you look to the left, you look to the right and you see the trench boxes you play in, you feel nothing but confident and you feel nothing but excitement because you're going to have fun. It's been nothing but a pleasure for me to play against such an amazing defensive line, like coach each other up and help each other out so when we play we just do our thing.

Q. You have some main guys -- how would you describe what he's been through and the progression that he's been on, one of those impact players?

KRIS JENKINS: You know, he's been an amazing hard worker since the second he stepped through this door. Nobody gave him a lot of credit when he was a three-scar and recruited but the second he walked through the door and put on that helmet, we knew. It's just his work ethic, how he pays attention to film, his football IQ. He takes every second of football seriously.

Q. Did you watch any of the Ohio State game last night?

KRIS JENKINS: I did. I didn't like that at all. That wasn't a team we played. I mean, you know, I'm a hater, so don't want to see them win but don't want to see them go out like that, either. That was rough.

Q. I know you're playing for yourselves and the opportunity is amazing, but is there any Big Ten pride on the line when you guys are representing?

KRIS JENKINS: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I feel like, right, it's funny because a lot of fans -- you hear a lot of fans -- this kid -- Big Ten, but it's real because a lot of SEC

fans feel like Big Ten don't even got a shot. You know, this is like -- I feel like this is a real opportunity to prove ourselves.

Q. Do you feel like this is a different Michigan team than the one that came here the last two years?

KRIS JENKINS: Absolutely. Absolutely. Not taking anything away from the players that come from here the past three years and the teams we've had, I feel like we're approaching every single game and especially approaching this game differently with a different mindset. Especially with our shock and effort. Our goal is to have nothing but shock and effort on every single play for the entire game.

You've always heard what is the greatest eraser of mistakes? Effort.

Q. Three times, do you feel you really have to win it this time?

KRIS JENKINS: No, sir. Those who continue to doubt us, that fuels us and we feel like when we have that bar up there, we perform better. You need that pressure, because -- inaudible -- it shouldn't be lackadaisical. We need to be. This is our legacy.

Q. Georgia, SEC team, a lot of the same qualities, having faced Georgia, you're not intimidated by Alabama?

KRIS JENKINS: No, absolutely not. They are a great team. Not taking anything away from them. Great team, got a lot of weapons on the board but they are a team just like us. They bleed just like us. At the end of the day, they are going to play their best game of football and so are we. So you know, we are just looking forward to the matchup at the end of the day. You know, these are games you live for. These are moments you live for. We just can't wait for Monday.

Q. A lot of players are talking about Jim Harbaugh, you probably know this, he's a little quirky.

KRIS JENKINS: Oh, absolutely.

Q. People are telling their favorite stories where he said or did something bizarre. Do you have a favorite or funny one?

KRIS JENKINS: My favorite one, shout-out Coach Harbaugh, my favorite story I got is when we get a night game, when we get a pre-game talk before Minnesota. He said, "I feel like tomorrow night is going to be a big night."

And he had the lyrics to the song, he sorted singing the whole song. But the message was there.

Q. What was the song?

KRIS JENKINS: Black Eyed Peas. He had the full verse and full lyrics on paper.

Q. Was he singing?

KRIS JENKINS: A little bit. A little bit.

Q. He does seem to find something to tie in with whatever's happening.

KRIS JENKINS: Absolutely, I will give him credit for that. His analogies are the best, absolutely, second-to-none.

Q. Even if they don't quite fit but they fit.

KRIS JENKINS: No, they fit. They fit regardless.

Q. Going against a quarterback like that -- does it motivate the edges and interior, the gap assignments, contain pressure, just the higher the challenge, does it motivate you all the more?

KRIS JENKINS: It motivates us when players run and rushes more. That's the biggest thing, you see people on film that are rushing by themselves, they are not playing as a unit. So of course he's going to cut them up and fine a lane.

The biggest thing is how we have been trained to play and working to play all year as a cohesive unit, we can definitely get after it and hold it close in the pocket. He's definitely a great athlete, though.

Q. Talking to J.J., you know, Paul, right? Paul from the Daily? He's writing a story about Cam?

KRIS JENKINS: Yeah, yeah.

Q. I got a question, I was talking to J.J. to help him out. We were talking about, why are defensive tackles to energetic. He says, you, Cam, you all have a bit of energy. Where does that come from? Is that a defensive tackle specific thing?

KRIS JENKINS: I think it's got to be. I think it's got to be. Even talking to my dad and uncle -- crazier than me. Like my uncle told me one day, you got to be a little crazy to play this game. So I think that's probably got to be something that ties into it; you've got to play like a defensive tackle.

I don't know, ever since I was a kid, I've always had that ADHD-type energy.

Q. Do you think it's just guys that your type of energy find that --

KRIS JENKINS: I think it's a little of both. For me, if I were a receiver, and I was definitely running more throughout the game, I'd definitely have a lot less energy doing everything else. But you know, I think that the love for just like, I don't know, just blocking shots, there's a lot of quick things -- I think that's probably it.

Q. With Zak still being around, he's walking on an injury that I don't think most people would walk for months and he's already walking around Disneyland. How inspiring is that to you guys to see him do that?

KRIS JENKINS: It's a huge inspiration. You see a guy like Zak that you identify as a captain or obvious reasons, and one of the reasons being he's the toughest person on our team. He's that backbone and he's that fortitude on our team. Even during the game, unfortunately when he went down, he got up and his immediate first reaction was making sure we did what we had to do to win the game.

Having him as a captain, his leadership, his strength just walking two days after surgery like nothing happened, and as far as us, you know, like do our job and do it for him because it's everything he's worked to to get us to this point.

Q. Puts things in perspective?

KRIS JENKINS: Absolutely.

Q. How has Bowl prep been for you?

KRIS JENKINS: Amazing. Amazing. We even got the ice tubs, the recovery and whatnot. So I've been feeling nothing but amazing. Feeling loose. Feel like I probably got my legs back. Just excited. Grass cleats, so no slipping, no nothing. We ready to go.

Q. Was that a problem last year with the cleats?

KRIS JENKINS: I hate to make excuses, anything like that.

Q. Not making excuses.

KRIS JENKINS: But especially after watching the Super Bowl game, too, where you start to see them slip a little bit, too, you're like, okay, I knew I wasn't tripping. Yeah, that

field had some slip.

Q. Was it your game or -- they switched cleats?

KRIS JENKINS: I think it was Super Bowl. We tried to but I think some of us, we weren't prepared for that. I just straight-up slipped before I could handle a double-team and I'm out of the play already. I'm like, dang.

But like I said, no excuses, none of that. But yeah, we prepared for any possibilities right now.

Q. Won't be a problem this year, kind of thing?

KRIS JENKINS: Absolutely.

Q. You guys obviously in your defensive line unit has been dominant all year, what can you say about your guys' ability to push the pocket and make Jalen Milroe uncomfortable throughout the game?

KRIS JENKINS: That's our biggest thing is we have to work as one and work as a unit because he's a great athlete. He finds the lanes. He can find the holes quick. So you know, our biggest thing is working together, and you know, working with that chemistry that we've been working with all year.

Q. What can you talk about Kenneth Grant's ability, obviously you guys are all freak athletes but we saw earlier in the year him chasing down running backs against Penn State, his ability to provide unique pressure on the inside.

KRIS JENKINS: For real, Kenneth Grant, he's been a freak and it's funny for us because when we see plays like that, what he does on Saturdays, it's no different to us because these are plays he does in practice every single day.

Like, if y'all turn on the practice film, I think y'all be more shocked what he does in practice, too. Not taking anything away from his game but he's always running a hundred miles per hour. So you know, kg is going to do what he does best, and that's absolutely wreck havoc. He's a quick boy, especially, for our big units. I don't think a lot of people expect that. So that's why he definitely gets after it.

Q. What's your biggest takeaway on Alabama's offense?

KRIS JENKINS: Definitely a (indiscernible) ball team -- definitely a team that feeds on and fuels on physicality. You definitely see that with how they try to run the ball and especially how they try to go after it with the pass.

Definitely shout-out to them because they got the weapons to do so. That's what they pride themselves on. But these are the games we live for, so we're excited.

Q. What teams that you guys have already played remind you of them?

KRIS JENKINS: I don't know. I feel like they are a different team. I can't make too many comparisons for real because this is going to be a different matchup. Maybe, like, maybe O-State. Maybe but I don't feel like -- well, not -- nothing against O-State, you feel me. But yeah, I feel like it's definitely a different team, Alabama. So shout-out to them.

Q. When you were preparing this past month, watching film on Alabama, like what games they played really stood out to you? What game did you get the most out of watching?

KRIS JENKINS: Texas. Yes, absolutely. Absolutely, Texas.

Really like for the fact that you can see both sides on the ball, like the offense they were running and the defense they were playing, you could see like, you know, when they were -- when they were playing like, you know, a challenge opponent, you could see how they function.

Georgia being also another good team.

Q. Their toughest game?

KRIS JENKINS: Absolutely.

Q. How does it make you feel when people say the SEC is the best conference in college football and have the best players?

KRIS JENKINS: Oh, yeah, literally that, like this is a perfect opportunity we feel like to prove ourselves to the world saying, you know, SEC players are like SEC conference or the Big Ten can't even hold a chop shot to the SEC. This is definitely our opportunity to do that.

Q. Do you feel like college football is becoming the Big Ten versus the SEC with Texas, Washington -- those two conferences next year, is that what college football is coming to?

KRIS JENKINS: Absolutely, yeah. This is going to be a big juggernaut. Now that we have Oregon, USC coming over here as well, Washington, yeah, it's definitely shaking up to do, yeah. It's kind of crazy.

Q. Your dad played in the NFL. People say college football is heading towards an NFL model with contracts getting big and all that. Do you like that as a college player? Do you want to see that?

KRIS JENKINS: Yes -- okay. Yes and no.

Q. Okay.

KRIS JENKINS: The reason I say yeah is you know, I feel like players definitely deserve it with the work they put in and deserve to get compensated, especially a lot of players being in positions while they are in school or especially after the fact, they brought a lot and they had a very successful college career and they can't do what they did before in college.

But you know, the reason I say no, is because I think that definitely take away a little bit from that team, from that college football team aspect that you see a lot of.

You know, like, at the end of the day, we'll see what happens. I'm not complaining about it right now.

Q. You said you watched a lot of Texas/Alabama film, how much do you think Alabama has changed since that game?

KRIS JENKINS: Oh, absolutely a lot. You can definitely see the change from Texas to Georgia, especially how well they play together and how well they work together. Definitely a lot of -- I would say it's certainly along with us, too.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...